

6-4-1967

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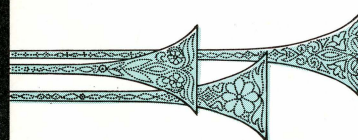
Chalk, John Allen, "Man's Three Deaths" (1967). *Herald of Truth Documents*. 24.
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Man's Three Deaths



Herald of Truth

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Man's Three Deaths

Three universal fears plague man. They are not new problems to the human family, however. The ancient world knew not only the heavy hands of Greece and Rome but it was also burdened by the fear of death. Medieval man's suspicion and ignorance were compounded by his fear of guilt. In addition to these very real and persistent fears today, modern man is also stalked by the fear of meaninglessness. Why must I die? Why do I feel so guilty? Why am I here? Life seems so uncertain. My life has no purpose. These are our concerns today, as they have attached themselves to men in every age.

In this lesson I want us to look carefully at our fear of death. Modern attitudes toward death indicate an unwillingness to consider this pertinent subject. We talk very little about death. Doctors and families wrestle with the inevitable question, "Should the patient be told?" Children receive all sorts of false impressions about death. Dr. Edgar N. Jackson tells of a little boy misinformed regarding his father's death. He was told that his father had simply gone on a trip. Concluding that his father had gone away because he had misbehaved, the son's resulting guilt complex ultimately had to be professionally treated. Modern man's attitude toward death approaches a sickness.

Sidney Cohen, a well-known psychiatrist in America, sounds this warning to us, "Death must become a more human experience. To preserve the dignity of death and prevent the living from abandoning or distancing themselves from the dying is one of the great dilemmas of modern medicine" (p. 77, *Harper's*, September, 1966). I would add, this is one of Christianity's greatest opportunities and challenges.

The things we say about death and the way we react to death often reveal the need for more acceptable attitudes.

Some men simply see death as the final end of it all. Last Christmas day a well-known gambler died in Los Angeles. Death, to him, was nothing more than "a sound sleep, undisturbed by foolish dreams" (p. 16, *Life*, January 6, 1967). Contrary to this attitude, however, Christ speaks His validated claim: "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die" (John 11:25, 26). Most of us have at one time or another thoughtlessly reacted to death in the words of the famous comic strip character, Pogo, "I hate death; in fact, I could live forever without it" (p. 43, *Pulpit Digest*, July-August, 1965).

The Bible talks about three kinds of death. All three deaths to which I refer are either directly revealed in the fall of Adam and Eve or are implied by that Biblical event. Death was not a part of God's original plan for His creatures. "And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). God gave Adam and Eve the Garden of Eden as their home, instructing them "to dress it and keep it" (Genesis 2:15). But he also gave them this responsibility and privilege, "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:16, 17). This is the Bible's first reference to death. Had Adam and Eve followed God's wishes for them, death would never have become a reality. This truth is recognized when the drama of the fall comes to a conclusion in verse twenty-four of *Genesis*, chapter three. "So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden the Cherubim, and the flame of a sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life." The ultimate conclusion of Adam's sin was a barring of him from "the tree of life." Death had now become a regular member of the human family.

Physical death is a direct result of man's disobedience to God in the Garden of Eden. The story of Eve's tempta-

tion is well-known (Genesis 3:1-8). Her failure to withstand is just as familiar. With Adam's consent and participation, Eve decided to go it alone without God! One of the curses God placed upon humanity through Adam and Eve was the sentence of physical death. Listen! "Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy pain and thy conception; in pain thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in toil shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis 3:16-19). Thousands of years later, the Apostle Paul looked at this incident and wrote about its consequences for you and me. "Therefore, as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned" (Romans 5:12).

From this moment forward all men faced the inevitability of fleshly, physical death. David, at the close of his life, said to Solomon, "I am going the way of all the earth" (I Kings 2:2). So completely is the human family gripped by physical death that one finds himself stating a truism when he talks about death's certainty. Early in his life, David asked, "What man is he that shall live and not see death, that shall deliver his soul from the power of Sheol" (Psalm 89:48)? The New Testament says, "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).

For all too many of us, however, this inevitability of death burdens us with a senseless anxiety. Many students of human behavior have observed an irrational attitude within many of us which they call "the death-wish." Many people, however, have found that physical death "can serve as an important organizing principle in determining how one conducts himself in life." Solomon said, "The wicked is thrust down in his evil-doing; but the righteous hath a refuge in his death" (Proverbs 14:32). When Christ directs one's life, physical death can actually become "a refuge."

There is also another kind of death described in God's Word, a death too immediately and easily recognized in our lives. Right back to the Garden of Eden we go to see this kind of death as another consequence of man's disobedience. Before Adam and Eve heard their sentence of

physical death, something much more significant happened in the Garden. Immediately after their disobedience the Bible says, "And they heard the voice of Jehovah God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of Jehovah God amongst the trees of the garden" (Genesis 3:8). Never before had they done this! Personal, intimate communion with God had been their continual joy prior to this moment! Now they feel themselves alienated and separated from God. They deliberately separated themselves from God's presence. God's banishment of Adam and Eve sealed their initial act of separating themselves from God. "So he drove out the man: and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden the Cherubim, and the flame of a sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life" (Genesis 3:24). Death, spiritual death, thus occurred in the lives of Adam and Eve. Physical death is the separation of our fleshly bodies from our immortal spirits (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Spiritual death is the separation of man from God, the cessation of any personal, intimate communion for the purpose of enjoying God's life and strength.

The New Testament speaks of spiritual death often. Of Adam's transgression Paul says, "Therefore, as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned" (Romans 5:12). In the next chapter of *Romans* the apostle concluded, "For the wages of sin is death; but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:24). Paul looks back on the time when the Ephesian Christians were not followers of Christ and says, "And you did he make alive, when ye were dead through your trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). Again spiritual death is described in *Colossians* 2:13, "And you, being dead through your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, you, I say, did he make alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses."

Christ came into the world to combat this enemy, spiritual death. "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly," He said (I John 10:10). "If a man keep my word, he shall never see death," He taught (John 8:51). Earlier in the same *Gospel* Jesus said, "It is the spirit that giveth life; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life" (John 6:63). Christ was God's life made available once again even as Adam and Eve experienced that life before sin came into the Garden of Eden.

There is a third kind of death also described in the Bible. John refers to it in the second chapter of *Revelation*.

"He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death" (Revelation 2:11). The same term, "second death," is again employed by the author of *Revelation* at chapter twenty. "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: over these the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" (Revelation 20:6).

While introducing us to this kind of death, both of these passages teach that we need not experience this "second death." In *Revelation* 2:11 those who withstand all the trials of faith and persecutions for righteousness will "not be hurt of the second death." In *Revelation* 20:6 we learn that the martyrs for the cause of Christ throughout the centuries will not be threatened by "the second death."

At *Revelation*, chapter twenty, we read an explanation of this "second death." John pictures the final judgment in verses eleven through fifteen. Listen! "And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat upon it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne; and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead that were in it; and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, even the lake of fire. And if any was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:11-15).

The "lake of fire" is that "eternal punishment" Jesus mentions in *Matthew* 25:46, that "unquenchable fire" Jesus says we should do all to avoid (Mark 9:43-48). And according to this reading from *Revelation* 20:15, the "lake of fire" is that place to which all will go who do not have their names inscribed in the Lamb's book of life. The "second death" is the ultimate conclusion to all evil. The "second death" spells separation and alienation from God forever.

Only those who refuse the triumph God offers in Christ, only those who persist in rebellion against the love and grace offered in Christ, and only those who refuse to reach out to God's open hand will know the "second death." "He that overcometh shall inherit these things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But for the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolators, and all liars, their part shall be in the lake that burneth with fire and

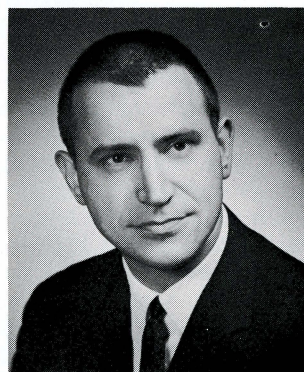
brimstone; which is the second death" (Revelation 21: 7, 8).

Death cannot be avoided. We inflict unnecessary misery on ourselves by failing to confront death's reality. The well-adjusted man willingly faces death in his life and thought. Nothing binds the divided human family more closely than the certainty of death. Death colors everything we do and say, consciously and unconsciously.

Those of us who have experienced the loss of precious friends and relatives through physical death can agree with Paul when he brands it an "enemy" (I Corinthians 15:26). Death is an enemy defeated but not yet destroyed. "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; then they that are Christ's at his coming . . . The last enemy that shall be abolished is death" (I Corinthians 15:22, 23, 26).

Spiritual life, however, gives us the hope of life beyond physical death. In Paul's language, "mortality is swallowed up in immortality." Christ triumphed over spiritual as well as physical death in the resurrection. He "was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification," Paul says (Romans 4:25). This means that when I become a part of His death, burial, and resurrection in baptism, I receive His spiritual life. Paul explains in *Romans*, chapter six, that this union in baptism gives me freedom from the guilt of past sins (Romans 6:1, 2) and new spiritual life with Christ (Romans 6:3, 4). Our obedience to Christ means that "now being made free from sin and become servants to God," we have our "fruit unto sanctification, and the end eternal life" (Romans 6:22).

As a child of God through our obedience to Christ in penitent, obedient faith (Mark 16:16), we face physical death as a step into eternity with God. We claim, through our surrender to His Word, God's gift of eternal life. Complete release from spiritual and eternal death is ours to joyfully and gratefully possess. Death, all three kinds of death, are understood and faced with the confidence of Christ's victory and God's promise.



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He began his work with the Herald of Truth on January 1, 1966. Previously, Chalk was the featured personality in a 13 week Herald of Truth television series.

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He is a graduate of Tennessee Tech and has written a book, "The Praying Christ and Other Sermons" and two tracts. Chalk was nominated for the Outstanding Young Man of Tennessee in 1964 and was named Cookeville's Young Man of the Year in 1963.